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Directorate of Intelligence

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Imagery Analysis Monthly Review

April 1982

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Gas Pipeline Explosion in Western Siberia, USSR (b)(3)

On 10 March 1982 an explosion destroyed a 250-meter section of a new, large-diameter natural gas pipeline that runs between the supergiant Urengoy gasfield in western Siberia and Perm. It is unlikely, however, that the explosion caused a major disruption in natural gas supplies because the ruptured pipeline was one of four along the Urengoy-Perm route—and it was quickly repaired.

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detected that an explosion of extremely high intensity and long duration had occured on 10 March, 400 kilometers (km) north of Sverdlovsk.

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trucks carrying new sections of pipe were observed near the explosion site.

the pipeline appeared to be repaired. Although the cause of the explosion could not be determined we believe it may have been caused by faulty welds or thermal stress from the arctic climatic conditions

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The pipeline, which was not present on June 1980, was probably completed recently. The new pipeline follows the same route as the three older pipelines except for a 4 km segment, where—probably because of the terrain—it is separated from the other three by about 1 km. Because the explosion occurred at this point in the pipeline, damage was sustained only by the new pipeline.

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Other explosions have occurred on Soviet pipelines. In the mid-1970s there were seven explosions on the then 10-year-old central Asian natural gas pipeline system. These explosions were probably caused by a combination of factors: corrosion by hydrogen sulfide which may not have been completely removed, the poor quality of Soviet large-diameter pipe, and substandard pipelaying methods.

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Site of Explosion on Natural Gas Pipeline Between Urengoy and Perm, USSR, 12 March 1982

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